

STATEMENT OF THE CLAIMS

1. (currently amended) A system for electronic presentment of bills and invoices related to goods and/or services provided by a first entity to a second entity comprising:

first means for authenticating at least one first-entity-class user that is associated with at least one first entity;

second means for authenticating at least one second-entity-class user that is associated with at least one second entity; and

an application server including

a first application component, operably coupled to said first means, that interacts in real-time over a network with an authenticated first-entity-class user to enter, create, maintain, and store billing information pertaining to at least one second entity and to create, maintain and store related invoices related to said billing information and pertaining to said at least one second entity, and

a second application component, operably coupled to said second means, that interacts in real-time over the network with an authenticated second-entity-class user to access portions of said billing information and related invoices pertaining to the authenticated second-entity-class user.

2. (original) The system of claim 1, wherein:

said first application component and said second application component operate in conjunction with data security logic to selectively control second-entity-class user

access to portions of said billing information and related invoices that pertain to an authenticated second-entity-class user.

3. (original) The system of claim 1, wherein:

said first application component and said second application component operate in conjunction with data security logic to selectively control first-entity-class user access to portions of said billing information and related invoices that pertain to an authenticated first-entity-class user.

4. (original) The system of claim 1, wherein:

said first means and said second means comprise a web server that operates in a demilitarized zone and that communicates with at least one component of said application server via secure communications through a firewall routing device.

5. (original) The system of claim 1, wherein:

first-entity-class users are logically partitioned into at least two different types each performing functions as part of an invoicing process, and said first application component includes logic modules corresponding to the different types of first-entity-class users, said logic modules interacting with corresponding types of browser-based first-entity-class users to perform said functions as part of the invoicing process.

6. (original) The system of claim 1, wherein:

second-entity-class users are logically partitioned into at least two different types each performing functions as part of an invoicing process, and said second application component includes logic modules corresponding to the different types of second-entity-class users, said logic modules interacting with corresponding types of browser-based second-entity-class users to perform said functions as part of the invoicing process.

7. (cancelled)

8. (currently amended) The system of claim 1 7, wherein:

said first application component enables access to particular billing information by at least one authenticated second-entity-class user in response to finalization of said particular billing information, wherein the finalization of said particular billing information is accomplished by real-time interaction over the network with an authenticated first-entity-class user.

9. (currently amended) The system of claim 8 7, wherein:

said particular billing information cannot be added to an invoice until approved by an authenticated second-entity-class user, wherein the approval of said particular billing information is accomplished by real-time interaction over the network with the authenticated second-entity-class user.

10. (cancelled)

11. (currently amended) The system of claim 1, wherein:

said first application component enables access to particular invoice information  
by at least one authenticated second-entity-class user only after posting of said particular  
invoice information, wherein the posting of said particular invoice information is  
accomplished by real-time interaction over the network with an authenticated first-entity-  
class user.

12. (original) The system of claim 1, wherein:

at least one of said first application component and said second application  
component cooperate with messaging logic to provide messages to authenticated users of  
the system regarding status of billing information and invoice information maintained by  
the system.

13. (original) The system of claim 1, wherein:

at least one of said first application component and said second application  
component interact in real-time over the network with authenticated users to define at  
least one project, wherein each given project pertains to a specific second entity and  
specifies rules and conditions associated with an invoicing process carried out with  
respect to given project.

14. (original) The system of claim 13, wherein:

each given project includes at least one of a name, time period for the project, information pertaining to the recurring nature of the time period, information regarding time-based billing for the project, and an indication that billing entries associated with the given project can be added to an invoice without prior approval by an authenticated second-entity-class user.

15. (currently amended) A method for electronic presentment of bills and invoices related to goods and/or services provided by at least first entity to at least one second entity comprising:

authenticating at least one first-entity-class user that is associated with at least one first entity;

interacting in real-time over a network with an authenticated first-entity-class user to enter, create, maintain, and store in a database billing information pertaining to at least one second entity and to create, maintain and store in said database ~~related~~ invoices related to said billing information and pertaining to said at least one second entity ~~in a database~~;

authenticating at least one second-entity-class user that is associated with a second entity; and

interacting in real-time over the network with an authenticated second-entity-class user to access from said database portions of said billing information and related invoices pertaining to the authenticated second-entity-class user ~~from said database~~.

16. (original) The method of claim 15, further comprising:

selectively controlling second-entity-class user access to portions of said billing information and related invoices that pertain to an authenticated second-entity-class user.

17. (original) The method of claim 15, wherein:

selectively controlling first-entity-class user access to portions of said billing information and related invoices that pertain to an authenticated first-entity-class user.

18. (cancelled)

19. (currently amended) The method of claim 15, further comprising wherein:

enabling access to particular billing information by at least one authenticated second-entity-class user in response to finalization of said particular billing information, wherein the finalization of said particular billing information is accomplished by real-time interaction over the network with an authenticated first-entity-class user.

20. (currently amended) The method of claim 19 ~~48~~, wherein:

said particular billing information cannot be added to an invoice until approved by an authenticated second-entity-class user, wherein the approval of said particular billing information is accomplished by real-time interaction over the network with the authenticated second-entity-class user.

21. (cancelled)

22. (currently amended) The method of claim 15 ~~24~~, further comprising wherein:

enabling access to particular invoice information by at least one authenticated second-entity-class user only after posting of said particular invoice information, wherein  
the posting of said particular invoice information is accomplished by real-time interaction over the network with an authenticated first-entity-class user.

23. (original) The method of claim 15, further comprising:

automatically generating messages to authenticated users of the system regarding status of billing information and invoice information maintained by the system.

24. (original) The method of claim 15, wherein:

interacting in real-time over the network with authenticated users to define at least one project, wherein each given project pertains to a specific client and specifies rules and conditions associated with the invoicing process carried out with respect to given project.

25. (original) The method of claim 24, wherein:

each given project includes at least one of a name, time period for the project, information pertaining to the recurring nature of the time period, information regarding time-based billing for the project, and an indication that billing entries associated with the given project can be added to an invoice without prior approval by an authenticated second-entity-class user.

26. (new) A method for electronic presentment of bills and invoices related to goods and/or services provided by at least first entity to at least one second entity comprising:

authenticating a first-entity-class user that is associated with a first entity;

interacting in real-time over a network with the authenticated first-entity-class user to enter, create, maintain, and store in a database billing information pertaining to at least one second entity and to create, maintain and store in said database invoices related to said billing information and pertaining to said at least one second entity;

interacting in real-time over the network with the authenticated first-entity-class user to invoke an invoice posting operation that grants access to a particular invoice stored in said database by at least one second-entity-class user;

authenticating the at least one second-entity-class user; and

only after said invoice posting operation, interacting in real-time over the network with the authenticated at least one second-entity-class user to access said particular invoice stored in said database.

27. (new) A method according to claim 26, wherein:

said billing information includes information regarding time-based billing for services carried out by a first entity as part of a project for a second entity.

28. (new) A method according to claim 27, further comprising:

enabling access to particular billing information by at least one authenticated second-entity-class user in response to finalization of said particular billing information, wherein the finalization of said particular billing information is accomplished by

interaction over the network with an authenticated first-entity-class user designated for such finalization.

29. (new) The method of claim 28, wherein:

particular billing information for a project cannot be added to an invoice until approved by an authenticated second-entity-class user designated for such approval.